

Meeting Summary

ROYAL STREET BUS GARAGE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, April 30, 2014
Alexandria City Hall, City Council Chambers

Members Present:

Mary Lyman, Committee Chair, Alexandria Planning Commission
Charlie Cantelli, Alexandria House Homeowners Association
Steve Goodman, Garrett's Mill Homeowners Association
Carolyn Merck, Old Town Civic Association
Richard Moncure, Portner's Landing Condominium Association
Janet Powell, Portner's Landing Homeowners Association
Cathy Puskar, NVBIA / NAIOP
Tom Soapes, North Old Town Independent Citizens' Association
Connie Staudinger, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (for Roy Priest)
Daniel Straub, Old Town North Urban Design Advisory Committee
Ken Wire, NVBIA / NAIOP

Members Absent:

Nancy Appleby, At-Large
Jim Doll, Chatham Square Homeowners Association
Joseph Resende, At-Large
Patricia "Velator" Smith, Annie B. Rose House

City Staff:

Jeff Farner, Department of Planning and Zoning
Tom Canfield, Department of Planning and Zoning
Carrie Beach, Department of Planning and Zoning
Jessica McVary, Department of Planning and Zoning
Richard Lawrence, Department of Planning and Zoning

Guests:

James Blair Knox, Alexandria House
Bill Sullivan, NOTICe and Alexandria House
Rosalyn Doggett, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Welcome and Introduction

Staff welcomed the Committee and provided an overview of the meeting agenda. Staff then briefly responded to questions received from Committee members after the April 2nd meeting, including questions related to floor area ratio (FAR). The Committee briefly discussed floor area

ratios, both conceptually and specific examples including the Asher and the Belle Pre. However, staff noted that showing specific examples of floor area ratio is a challenge because it requires design assumptions.

Staff also provided additional information related to building height, in response to discussions during the April 2nd meeting. Staff noted that topography is an important consideration related to height, as there is an approximate change in grade of five feet on the site. In response to dialogue during the previous Committee meeting, staff reviewed the average floor to floor heights and total heights of buildings currently under construction in the City. In general, the average heights for multi-family, wood-framed buildings were generally in a range of 60 to 70 feet.

Committee Discussion

The Committee and staff then discussed construction types, average floor to floor height, total height and the desire of the building industry to limit constraints to ensure a variety of heights on the site.

Staff recommended that the Committee consider adding the following language to the design principles:

- The 60 foot height limit may be increased to a maximum of 70 feet, subject to the requirements herein and the following standards, which shall be determined as part of the development review process:
 - The height is required due to the proposed building type and floor to floor heights;
 - The height enables significant additional variety of height within the block, and
 - The height enables significant enhancements to the massing and architectural design.

The Committee discussed whether the proposed height was appropriate, the affect that additional height would have on the view shed and whether additional language should be included to address the height of the rooftop mechanical equipment. Each Committee member shared their opinions on the appropriate height for the block.

The Committee then voted on the following design principle:

- Heights may transition from higher on the northern portion of the site to lower along the southern portion of the site. Heights adjacent to townhomes shall be no more than 50 feet. Opportunity for additional height, up to 70 feet, is possible on the northeast corner of the site or within the central portion of the site if adequate transitions and building step-backs are provided to maintain a pedestrian-oriented streetscape. In addition, rooftop mechanical equipment shall be located and screened in such a manner as to minimize visual impact and abate noise.
- Two Committee members opposed the 70-foot height.

The Committee then began to discuss the appropriate zoning for the site. Based on the surrounding context, and the uses discussed by the group, staff recommended that the Committee consider a Commercial Residential Mixed-Use zone for the site, subject to the requirements included in the design principles drafted by the Committee.

The Committee then voted on the following design principle:

- A potential rezoning to a CRMU-zone and a maximum of 2.5 FAR will be considered.
- Two Committee members opposed this principle.

The Committee then discussed the following principle and unanimously determined that it should be deleted:

- The proposed buildings shall utilize the architecture to recall the industrial heritage of the site. Consider incorporating a portion of the existing structure as part of the new development.

The Committee then began to discuss the design principle related to building massing and height. The Committee previously requested that staff provide revised language for their consideration. Staff proposed the following language:

- The buildings shall provide a variety of massing and height to avoid the appearance of a single large project, but rather an organic collection of components, consistent with the building type in Alexandria.

The Committee discussed the above language and refined the principle to state:

- The proposed project shall have the appearance of a collection of compatible building components and avoid the appearance of a single large building.
- The Committee unanimously agreed to this principle.

The Committee discussed the principle related to desired public benefits, including the provision of a community room and the appropriate locations for off-site open space improvements. The Committee also discussed if it was appropriate to be specific in the desired public benefits, or if the public benefits should be determined through the development special use permit process.

- As part of the rezoning and development special use permit process, off-site open space improvements shall be provided to enhance connections to the Potomac River and Oronoco Bay Park.
- The Committee unanimously agreed to this principle.

Public Comment

The Committee then heard comments from the public. A resident spoke about the importance of building setbacks and noted that heights could be determined as part of a future process, but the setbacks are integral and should be discussed in greater detail as part of this process.

Committee Discussion

After hearing comments from the public, the group then discussed adding a principle which required specific exhibits to be submitted as part of the development review process. The language reviewed and adopted by the Committee is included below:

- As part of the rezoning and development special use permit process, and review by the Urban Design Advisory Committee, the following exhibits will be required.
 - A concept land use, circulation, building height and open space diagram indicating how the vehicular circulation to this site will be configured and indicating how the streetscape and open space characteristics of this site will be coordinated with the neighborhood streetscape, open space and park elements;
 - A proposed site plan showing specific building location layout, vehicular and pedestrian circulation/parking, ground level open space, and streetscape layout and characteristics;
 - A minimum of two sections through the site depicting proposed building locations and massing, adjacent street rights of way and adjacent existing buildings and heights;
 - Architectural elevations of each proposed building;
 - Sections of each proposed pedestrian streetscape; and
 - A generalized concept landscape plan for the project indicating how public and private open spaces on the site are to be addressed.

- One Committee member opposed this principle.

A Committee member noted that the provision of off-street visitor parking is an important issue which should be considered as part of this process. The Committee member stated that a requirement for the provision of off-street visitor parking should be included as a design principle for this site. Several Committee members agreed that this is an important issue which should be considered in a future process, but ultimately did not develop a design principle to address this issue.

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Staff asked the Committee members to share the draft design principles with their organizations to determine if there is general consensus with the principles, or if there are other topics that should be considered. Staff agreed to send the final draft of the design principles to the Committee with an introduction which explained the process and the mission of the Committee. Staff requested that each Committee member prepare a letter which includes the comments received from their organization. Staff agreed to circulate the letters received from each member to the Committee, as well as post them to the project website. If the letters received indicate that

the representative organizations have significant concerns with the draft principles, the Committee agreed to hold an additional meeting.